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**Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development**
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# Multi-stakeholder dialogue segment of the second session of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development

## Note by the Secretary-General

**Addendum**

## Dialogue paper by non-governmental organizations*

* Prepared by the Third World Network, the Environment Liaison Centre International and the Danish 92 Group, the three non-Governmental organizations invited by the secretariat of the World Summit on Sustainable Development as the organizing partner of the dialogue segment for non-Governmental organizations. In no way do the authors claim or wish to claim to represent the views of all non-Governmental organizations. An attempt has been made to reflect views as encountered in the preparatory process so far. The present paper has mainly been elaborated on the basis of positions taken by non-Governmental organizations at the meetings of regional preparatory committees in the past few months. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

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*Explanatory note*

The present paper is the result of a joint effort between the following non-governmental organizations (NGOs): the Third World Network, the Environment Liaison Centre International and the Danish 92 Group, in cooperation with the Northern Alliance for Sustainability (ANPED). This paper is an initial contribution to the multi-stakeholder dialogue session of the second session of the Commission on Sustainable Development acting as the preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development and as the basis of further NGO discussions throughout the process. The paper collects the views expressed by those NGO groups that participated in the regional preparatory conferences and comments received via various e-mail LISTSERVs. Special attention has been paid to "Southern" NGO perspectives in order that they may be featured during the dialogues.

The authors do not claim to represent the views of all NGOs in the present paper, but have made an attempt to reflect those views articulated so far in the preparatory process. This paper will further develop through discussion and dialogue in the coming months to encompass, as far and as broadly as possible, the common views of the global NGO community. The present paper is a beginning for this process in which the aim is not to reach consensus on issues or priorities but to articulate the range of views. Even with continual discussion and dialogue, it may not be possible to include all views, given that the NGO community is too diverse and time is too short to reach all, especially those who are engaged in vital work at the local level. For that reason, this paper, and its future versions, will never become the definitive NGO paper, but one among many covering the diverging views and experiences.

The first section of this paper, written by Third World Network, with input received through an Internet-discussion facilitated by the Environment Liaison Centre International, describes views held by the two network organizations as well as key concerns voiced by many NGOs and their networks on the reasons for the failure to effectively implement the sustainable development agenda since 1992. The section follows the four themes of the multi-stakeholder dialogue. The second section, written by the Danish 92 Group, and made available for discussion on the Internet, summarizes and analyses the positions taken by NGOs at the regional and subregional consultations.

Funding for NGO participation in the preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development and for the preparation of this paper was very limited. The authoring networks concerned will work towards ensuring more consultation time for the preparation of the dialogue paper for the next multi-stakeholder dialogue at the fourth preparatory session and will appeal to funding sources in this regard. The authors look forward to a lively discussion in further adjusting the content of the paper, and, perhaps most importantly, to discovering our common ground now that we stand at the crossroads of international sustainable development cooperation.

# I. Introduction

## Backdrop to the preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development[1]

1. The preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development are taking place against a gloomy backdrop. The World Bank *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty*, states that

> "(T)he World has deep poverty amid plenty. Of the world's 6 billion people, 2.8 billion — almost half — live on less than $2 a day, and 1.2 billion — a fifth — live on less than $1 a day, with 44 per cent living in South Asia ... The average income of the richest 20 countries is 37 times the average in the poorest 20 — a gap that has doubled in the past 40 years."

The *Environment Strategy for the World Bank* concludes that:

> "(E)conomic development ... (g)ains have been unevenly distributed, and a large part of the world's population remains desperately poor. At the same time, environmental factors such as indoor and outdoor air pollution, waterborne diseases, and exposure to toxic chemicals threaten the health of millions of people, and natural resources — land, water, and forests — are being degraded at alarming rates in many countries .... The economic costs of environmental degradation have been estimated at 4 to 8 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) annually in many developing countries."

2. The *Living Planet Report 2000*, produced by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and its partners, found that, in 1996, the Ecological Footprint of people exceeded

> "the existing biologically productive space per person by about 30 per cent, or more if some space is reserved exclusively for other species. In other words, humanity's Ecological Footprint was at least 30 per cent larger than the area available. This overshoot leads to a gradual depletion of the earth's natural capital stock, as reflected by the decline in the Living Planet Index."

A great many assessments of the state of the world and trends since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro are being prepared for the World Summit on Sustainable Development; these are expected to demonstrate continuing negative trends.

# II. Assessment of progress in implementing chapter 27 of Agenda 21

3. The review and assessment of progress in implementing sustainable development at the second preparatory session has two major dimensions with regards to NGOs. First, NGO perspectives on the failure of the promises and commitments of "sustainable development" and the concomitant triumph of the globalization and liberalization paradigm manifested in the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Bretton Woods institutions and the increased wealth and power of transnational corporations, often supported by exported credit agencies. Second, the role of NGOs as partners for sustainable development as envisaged in chapter 27 of Agenda 21.

4. The globalization and liberalization process that has swept the world in the last two decades is today acknowledged to have created deep inequities. That process has intensified in the years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. The crux of the problem is the unequal distribution of power and wealth in the world, both within and between countries. The massive protests at major global conferences and the unreported local protests by civil society against the pitfalls of globalization are growing — these are signs of the crisis of sustainable development.

5. For NGOs and civil society to be effective in promoting more sustainable livelihoods, civil society must have rights and political opportunity to interact with Governments and participate meaningfully in decision-making processes at the national level. Irrespective of national realities, civil society (especially indigenous peoples and local communities) has had considerable success in maintaining and promoting good practices and innovative experiences relating to sustainable development. There is growing documentation of these good practices, both by NGOs, research institutions and United Nations agencies. However, these are often threatened or not

mainstreamed into policy due to lack of institutional support.

6 Civil society actors have played significant roles to investigate, monitor, expose and educate — be it the performance of national Governments, regional and international financial institutions or trade organizations/agreements. However, there is still much to strengthen and to learn from the experiences of the past decade: the linkages among sectoral and cross-cutting issues; informed knowledge of decision-making mechanisms; and linkages among partners at the local, national, regional and global levels. The diversity and flexibility of civil society has the potential to influence and shape the sustainable development agenda. For this to be realized, Governments need to ensure the political sphere for that to take place.

7. Good governance is equally needed at the global level. But the major countries refuse to democratize at the international level, where the global decisions are taken mainly by the Group of Eight, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Bretton Woods institutions or WTO, without the adequate participation of smaller nations, let alone civil society. Developed nations pressure poorer countries to liberalize their economies, but continue to practise protectionism, in insisting on patenting their technologies, and biopiracy and do not open their doors to the products and labour of the South. At the same time, the Governments of many developing countries also lack the political will to embrace civil society at the national level and thus lack the capacity to mobilize global good governance.

8. Thus we need a democratization and transformation of global institutions, and we need to make people aware of their insights. This can only happen when people's movements and civil society participate actively in making fundamental changes. We need to voice our concern about the concentration of wealth through existing market structures, with their ability to destroy the wealth of small countries through financial speculation.

9. These challenges to meet the goal of sustainable development require the full and effective participation of civil society. However, from the outset, it is important to emphasize that there must be a distinction between the private sector (especially transnational corporations and financial institutions) and citizens' organizations (both formal and informal). It would be false to assume that all groups are "equal stakeholders". The reality is that vast majorities of our societies are not organized for purposes of engagement with formal structures, with many being marginalized from development. Governments individually and collectively thus have a big responsibility to be an arbiter of conflicting interests, recognizing that there are serious inequities (wealth and power) both nationally and globally. However, in an increasingly globalized world, the trend is that Governments favour the private sector over civil society. Thus it is absolutely crucial that civil society members are full and effective participants in decision-making that seek to resolve conflicts of interests and rights.

### Overall progress achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21

10. In assessing their efforts to contribute to the implementation of the various United Nations programmes resulting from United Nations summits and conferences, as well as multilateral environmental agreements, many NGOs and NGO networks share the same observations and concerns. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development process generated unprecedented levels of awareness about environmental issues and the link between environment and development. There were high hopes and commitments to achieve the integration of environment and development in a new North-South partnership.

11. However, almost 10 years after the Rio conference, the sustainable development agenda has not been implemented. While some progress has been made at the local level (especially by communities and some local Governments with active NGO participation in many cases), the overall prognosis is negative. While there has been improved access for civil society and progress in concluding the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the Kyoto Protocol and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the implementation of multilateral environmental agreements as a whole has been disappointing. In almost every case, there is even weakening if not outright rejection of the spirit and letter of multilateral environmental agreements by certain countries. Instead, the globalization paradigm with its free market-driven liberalization has overtaken the Rio agenda. An overwhelming number of NGOs identify globalization as the fundamental obstacle to sustainable development.

12. The ecological crisis has worsened, including: loss of biodiversity; deforestation; global warming and rising sea levels, with small island developing States being the most vulnerable; adverse climate change; unsustainable industrial fishing practices; inappropriate land use policies; biopiracy; new technologies with far-reaching environmental and health impacts, such as genetic engineering; industrial agriculture (including destructive aquaculture); big dams and resettlement schemes; destructive mining projects; water scarcity; deteriorating water quality; desertification and land degradation; air pollution; unsustainable tourism; privatization and commodification of land, traditional knowledge and the displacement of peoples, especially indigenous peoples; massive land reclamation projects. These and many other threats lead to economic and social insecurity on a large scale, as well as to the violation of the right to a healthy environment and livelihood.

13. Poverty remains pervasive and inequity in income distribution has worsened, both within countries and between the rich and poor. There is a growing and unsustainable external debt burden in many developing countries, emerging economies and economies in transition, including those that once enjoyed relatively high economic growth. The causes include the rapid financial liberalization in the post-Rio years, which created an unstable international financial system (example: unregulated capital flows and speculation), and the faulty policy prescriptions and conditionalities of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The increased concentration of wealth, and hence power and influence, of transnational corporations, often supported by export credit agencies and large domestic firms, has created more unequal relations. It has also contributed to national and international corruption. Crippling external debt, continuing unfair terms of trade for the exports of developing countries, especially least developed countries, which are primarily commodity producers, also continue to be obstacles to the implementation of sustainable development in that natural resources are unsustainably exploited with little re-invested in development programmes. Recent documentation reveals that over the last 10 years many of the poorer developing countries have in fact lost capacity in economic terms. This further undermines efforts to shift towards sustainable development, even if there is political will, as a healthy domestic private sector and viable livelihoods for communities are necessary for sustainable development.

14. The nexus between environment and development that was affirmed at the Rio conference has been weakened, if not broken, in policy and political terms. With the unfulfilled commitments to meet the 0.7 per cent of GDP target and the transfer of environmentally sound technology by developed countries, both the developing countries and the United Nations implementing bodies have been unable to implement sustainable development. At the same time, the more aggressive implementation of trade agreements (under the WTO, regional and bilateral agreements) has worsened socio-economic conditions and the environment in many countries. The fifth WTO Ministerial Conference, which adopted an even broader agenda for more economic liberalization, far beyond trade issues, will have a major impact on the autonomy and ability of countries to choose sustainable development options. This in turn will further limit the opportunity for civil society to offer diverse options and proposals.

15. This failure to shift towards sustainable development is caused by the weakening of political leaders in almost all countries. In the developed countries and developing countries alike, poor political leadership has capitulated to the demands of corporate interests and traded off social and environmental concerns both domestically and internationally.

16. A major weakness of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development was the dismantling of the notion of regulating the private business and financial sector, especially transnational corporations. In its place was the notion of business as a partner in sustainable development, on par with all other "stakeholders". Today, in a world that is more unequal, with a small number of transnational corporations dominating each sector and exerting tremendous influence over Governments, this concept of "partnership and stakeholders" perpetuates the myth that there is a collective endeavour, and that all players are equal and conflicts of interest can be resolved by roundtables seeking consensus.

17. Many NGOs are extremely concerned over the Global Compact initiated by the Secretary-General of the United Nations. By granting extensive privilege to the world's largest transnational corporations many of which have unacceptable environmental and human rights records, the Compact underscores the inequities faced by developing countries, civil society and non-governmental and people's organizations at the

negotiating table and at decision-making venues. We note that some Governments have also voiced similar concerns. Many NGOs and other civil society partners are thus calling for a dissolution or substantial redesign of the Global Compact within the next six months, and it should not be used as a model or substantive input to the World Summit on Sustainable Development. A number of assessment reports by organizations monitoring the members of the Global Compact will be available for the preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

18. There is a growing call for the Governments at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, rather than relying on self-regulation, to revive the important concept of corporate accountability. While there has been emphasis on corporate responsibility, it depends on corporations to voluntarily "do the right thing". Corporate accountability on the other hand refers to the legal obligation of a corporation to ensure socially and environmentally responsible behaviour.

19. The principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" has been systematically turned around so that developing countries bear a heavier environmental, economic and social burden so that developed countries may continue with business as usual. At the domestic level, the poor and underprivileged bear the burden for the unsustainable consumption and wealth accumulation of the rich.

20. The limitations and failures of globalization as a model, and the failure of Governments to act in favour of sustainable development, has led to growing public questioning and demands around the world. The preparation process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development offers a valuable opportunity for diverse NGOs and networks to contribute concrete ideas for policy, programmes and projects in sustainable development and, more importantly, to galvanize political awareness and pressure on Governments and institutions to take action. Many civil society organizations are committed to refining and submitting these action ideas in the coming months.

### The role of non-governmental organizations as partners for sustainable development

21. In the responses from NGOs to a questionnaire, as well as other assessments from NGO networks, on whether the past 10 years have seen a strengthening of their role, some broad conclusions can be drawn. NGOs have played and continue to play an important role in initiating and supporting various local activities to implement sustainable development. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development process witnessed a broad, direct and meaningful involvement of NGOs in shaping the international agenda for perhaps the first time in global negotiations. In the 10 years since the Rio conference, the profile and standing of NGOs, generally speaking, has improved at national, regional and international levels.

22. However, one of the biggest challenges facing civil society at all levels is the lack of fully integrated participation in decision-making processes. Despite big gains for NGO profile and prestige since Rio, most NGOs remain outside the decision-making machinery of national, regional and international bodies that determine policies. The approach adopted at Rio proved tentative, at best, in its formulation of policies towards NGOs, and chapter 27 has proved to be a mere soul-searching process, not a bold framework for empowerment of civil society within environmental governance.

23. The independence and sustainability of NGOs were also identified as crucial factors in ensuring that NGOs can play an effective role in monitoring and implementing sustainable development. Resources, training and capacity-building in research and advocacy, project planning and implementation were emphasized.

24. NGOs themselves have vastly expanded their capacity to engage at the international level, as has been seen at the Commission on Sustainable Development and in the negotiations of the landmines treaty. Engagement with United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), UNDP and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has also progressed. However, there are concerns that the corporate partnerships between United Nations agencies and big business (in addition to the Global Compact) will create more unequal participatory relations among the various major groups. This could undermine public confidence in the United Nations and efforts to implement sustainable development that is people-centred.

25. The translation of Agenda 21 into national plans, municipal programmes and school curricula, as well as

the national implementation of multilateral environmental agreements and the work programmes and plans of other United Nations summits can all be attributed, to some extent, to the fact that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development process opened the doors for NGOs vis-à-vis Governments and other agencies. Many NGOs have the trust of the people, and now the Government machinery too has begun to engage in dialogue and tap into their expertise and skills. More importantly, in some cases at least, NGOs are no longer considered adversaries but as partners in achieving the goals of sustainable development. Much remains to be done to build upon these changes.

26. NGOs have made significant progress in raising public awareness through increased monitoring, information collection/analysis and networking. For example, public awareness of trade issues and the role and impact of WTO has grown. Outreach on the national implementation of Agenda 21 and multilateral environmental agreements has been undertaken by civil society organizations. More of course can be and needs to be done.

27. NGOs have also forged closer ties and genuine partnerships among themselves. Access to the Internet has boosted cooperation and capacity-building among NGOs with access to the web and with regular electricity supplies. However, NGOs in many developing countries, especially those working at the community level, still face problems of access to the Internet. At the same time, there is a need for continued support for the use of other means of communication and information dissemination, including audio communications and regular mail, and in the various local languages.

28. Women's organizations and networks have played a significant role in shaping the discussions on sustainable development, implementing concrete projects and advocating the formal participation of women at all levels of decision-making. However, progress in the last area is still unsatisfactory.

29. Since the holding of the Rio conference, the conclusion and entry into force of the United Nations/Economic Commission for Europe Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (Aarhus Convention) is a notable achievement that has ennanced the role of NGOs in the environmental arena. In regard to the Convention, the extent of implementation and the attainment of environmental justice in practice will present a challenge. The opportunity for other countries and regions to give legal recognition and protection to social, economic, political and environmental human rights in the context of sustainable development, taking into account the diversity of societies, will be the next step forward.

## A. Integrative approaches to sectoral and cross-sectoral objectives of sustainable development

30. United Nations summits and conferences of the 1990s have all addressed the need for "partnerships". In order to ensure that action plans are effectively implemented, the Rio, Copenhagen, Cairo, Beijing and Istanbul conferences have all emphasized the need to draw on the support of all segments of society, including NGOs, the private sector, academics, media, women, youth and indigenous groups.

31. To date, NGOs have carried out several successful integrative campaigns that cut across sectors and issues, including the prominent campaign on gender sensitization, through which women's groups managed to get their voices heard in the global forum. The campaign against the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, which led the members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to abandon the project in 1998, shows how NGOs can campaign in the absence of formal institutions. The Brazilian NGO Hunger Campaign resulted in major political change in 1993. Concerted action by NGOs to establish an effective International Criminal Court is also an example of how NGOs, in concert with like-minded States, can exert pressure to negotiate issues. The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), has also seen strong involvement of NGOs which has underpinned almost all successful responses to the AIDS epidemic. The recent successful campaign by NGOs and developing country Governments to ensure that the poor and needy have access to affordable drugs led to the adoption of the Declaration on Trade-related Intellectual Property Rights and Public Health at the Fifth Ministerial Conference of WTO.

32. However, the "successes" have been disparate and few. In policy terms, there is little integration at all levels. NGOs have often been reactive rather than pro-active, constantly caught in the dilemma between monitoring/exposing and advocating innovative approaches to integration of sectoral and cross-sectoral sustainable development objectives. Nevertheless, NGOs have progressed in identifying and understanding the obstacles to sustainable development implementation. The challenge is to be able to combine the various roles and activities, with a supportive political environment.

## B. Enabling multi-stakeholder participation in sustainable development institutions and mechanisms

33. Overall, civil society participation in decision-making at all levels still leaves much to be desired. To start with, the independence of thought and action of NGOs is to a large extent a factor of the source of their funding. The untied funding field is narrow and highly competitive. Restrictions in freedom of speech and action are more the norm in most countries. While attitudes towards NGOs are slowly changing, contributed significantly by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the question of public access to information in a timely and reliable fashion is not yet the reality in most jurisdictions. This remains a priority if participation is to be effective. Access to justice is an even more contentious issue with very few countries affording locus standi to interested parties.

34. In general, effective NGO participation in sustainable development institutions and mechanisms is premised upon:

(a) Access to reliable information has not always been forthcoming from national Governments. Currently, given new levels of security concerns, some Governments are acting to restrict wide circulation of information;

(b) Access to information held by corporations, especially transnational corporations, and export credit agencies is even more restrictive. There have been widening claims by industry for the protection of "confidential information" far beyond trade secrets and confidential business information. Information necessary for environmental impact assessment and biosafety assessment are two examples;

(c) Structures and mechanisms for consultation and participation at all levels of decision-making have very rarely been set up by Governments to involve NGOs on a regular ongoing basis. At best, an issue-based approach has been adopted, depending upon the level of public outcry against projects or development schemes;

(d) The concept of a level playing field and equity among the major groups crosses national, regional and international arenas. Governments are increasingly comfortable making decisions with industry representatives and closing doors to citizen groups all in the name of privatizing and liberalizing the economy. In the process, the small and medium scale entrepreneurs, workers and farmers are left to fend for themselves, usually at the expense of environmental, labour and human rights standards. A clear distinction has to be made between the large and powerful transnational corporations and the small-scale firms and farms.

35. The experiences of the Commission on Sustainable Development in conducting multi-stakeholder dialogues offer valuable lessons, both positive and negative. The United Nations Forum on Forests and other United Nations agencies have also initiated multi-stakeholder dialogue processes. During the regional consultations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development multi-stakeholder consultations were held. Documentation on these experiences and other forms of civil society engagement with multilateral institutions is growing and these will be valuable for all those taking part in the World Summit on Sustainable Development process. With adequate time and resources, civil society organizations have been able to prepare well for the Commission on Sustainable Development dialogues, but in most cases there is frustration that the multi-stakeholder dialogues are separate and distinct from the intergovernmental deliberations and decision-making.

36. Where concrete decisions are made following a multi-stakeholder dialogue, the follow-up has been disappointing. One example is the 1998 decision of Governments, at the sixth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development to initiate a multi-stakeholder review of voluntary initiatives and

agreements. The proposal came from a range of civil society organizations, supported by trade unions, at the first Commission on Sustainable Development/multi-stakeholder dialogues on industry and sustainable development. The Commission on Sustainable Development adopted the idea and the responsibility for identifying the elements of such a review was given to the NGO Taskforce on Business and Industry, the International Chamber of Commerce, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and UNEP. A conceptual framework for the evaluation was worked out, but the actual review has not taken place, in large part due to the reluctance of industry.

37. As an underlying concern, it has emerged that the multi-stakeholder dialogue approach, be it national or global, may sideline other forms of participation. While it can be useful, it is inherently restrictive, especially in relation to the diversity of civil society organizations. Where local communities are concerned, the situation is more problematic, as can be seen from the inadequate participation of farmers, non-organized workers and other marginalized groups in our societies.

38. Another concern is the unequal status among the various major groups, which does not serve to further the goals of sustainable development nor does it augur well in terms of furthering the prospects for genuine partnership. This, considered in the light of globalization that has characterized the global economic scene since the Rio conference, can exacerbate the North-South divide and the unequal power relations among stakeholders, eventually threatening the successful outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development itself.

39. In the face of spreading demands for participation, some multilateral institutions, including the World Bank, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), UNDP, UNEP and FAO, have been reviewing their policies and practices for engaging and enhancing civil society participation in their decision-making machinery and implementation programmes. Preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development are also an impetus for such reviews. NGOs that have participated, as well as those that have not, will bring their experiences, concerns and recommendations to the process.

40. However, at other international institutions where major decisions that impact directly on the goals of sustainable development are made, participation by NGOs is uneven at best and absent at worst. In the case of WTO, for example, even Governments are voicing their objections at the lack of transparency and the undemocratic decision-making processes.

## C. Opportunities for new implementation initiatives in response to identified hotspots, constraints and participatory needs

41. Some proposals can be drawn from various NGO inputs and initiatives: further increasing and enhancing of the role of NGOs in sustainable development efforts would decisively contribute to the reinvigoration of the sustainable development implementation process. In this regard, NGOs should have reliable access to information and not be impeded in their efforts to raise awareness of important issues at all levels, from the community to the global. Solid criteria or standards have to be put in place by national Governments and international bodies to ensure that NGO participation and consultation is not perfunctory, that their input is seriously considered and that their involvement is truly meaningful at all levels of decision-making.

42. NGOs should be assisted in strengthening their own capacities and ability to network with each other more effectively. Frameworks and guidelines for the engagement of civil society with national Governments, regional and international organizations and donors should be determined in an open, transparent and inclusive manner.

43. The precondition for any successful implementation initiative, however, is the transformation of unfair and inequitable institutions and processes at all levels, so that good practices can be duplicated, mainstreamed and implemented. Strengthening the United Nations is a priority for many NGOs, because the last 10 years have seen the shift of global socio-economic policy-making to WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions, with those organizations themselves increasingly safeguarding narrow interests that are antagonistic to sustainable development. A strengthened United Nations needs to be rooted in the spirit and letter of the Charter of the United Nations, "We the peoples ...". At the same time, reform of the global economic institutions is also urgently needed. Ideas and proposals have emerged but the political will is lacking. NGOs therefore commit themselves to

addressing the issues of good governance at all levels, while working to implement and mainstream successful sustainable development experiences.

44. Regarding the call for the World Summit on Sustainable Development to give priority to corporate accountability, the proposals from civil society organizations include: (a) A legally binding global framework for corporate accountability and liability under the United Nations that is determined in an open and transparent manner; (b) A global system or mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating corporate performance; (c) Corporate sustainability reporting; (d) Reform of advertising (not just about "promoting sustainable consumption" but more importantly about the destructive impact of mass advertising); (e) Addressing obstacles to subsidy reform; and (f) Regulating inappropriate corporate influence on policy, both national and global. On the part of civil society, there is commitment to forge stronger alliances for corporate accountability.

45. Ten years ago, Governments and civil society participants arrived at a global consensus that business as usual was not sustainable, and a new partnership was promised based, inter alia, on "common but differentiated responsibilities", the transformation of unsustainable consumption and production, the polluter pays principle, the precautionary principle and the need to integrate ecological, economic and social dimensions in order to attain sustainable development. We call on all Governments and civil society members to reaffirm those commitments in their full integrity.

# III. Summary of regional consultations of non-governmental organizations[2]

### Assessment of progress in the implementation of the outcomes of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

46. This section of the NGO paper summarizes the outcomes of a number of NGO consultations made in connection with the meetings of the regional preparatory committees. In some cases, additional information has been drawn from subregional forums, particularly where NGO participation in the regional events was limited or where the regional reports may not have adequately captured the richness of the NGO viewpoints put forward. There were difficulties with the selection process for, and limited participation in, some regional consultations, which influenced the outputs of those consultations. This summary can therefore not be said to be comprehensive or fully representative of the views of NGOs otherwise engaged in the preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. In spite of this, it is possible to identify trends and commonalties in the various outputs. Every effort has been made to remain true to the spirit and range of perspectives that emerged from the regional NGO consultations. This paper does not represent an NGO consensus but is rather a compendium of views from NGO meetings. It was made broadly available for review by NGO networks through the Internet prior to being finalized for distribution. A more comprehensive review of progress was not possible due to time and funding constraints and also because the regional NGO consultations (and subregional consultations) put greater emphasis on identifying future directions than on assessing progress to date.

### Regional views on general progress since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development

47. The regional NGO consultations acknowledged that some improvements related to democracy and peace have helped incorporate environmental concerns into development processes and prioritized people-centred sustainable development. However, it was felt that this had not carried through from "principle" to "action". This, then, is the challenge for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. It will include dealing with such constraints to progress as lack of institutional and human capacity, political will and a sense of priority, as well as inadequate public awareness, monitoring and enforcement.

48. Areas where progress was seen included the proliferation of national and local Agenda 21 initiatives, and the development of national sustainable development and cross-sectoral environmental strategies in some countries and regions. A few specific positive developments were mentioned, notably the declaration by the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for Environment in Abu-Dhabi in February 2001. The declaration recognized the urgent need for poverty alleviation and improvement of living standards and economic conditions through environment and sustainable development programmes.

**Obstacles and areas for further action identified in the regions**

49. Ten years after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, NGOs see that unsustainable development is still the norm in all regions. NGO consultations clearly noted the failure to fulfil the Rio commitments, and that this has exacerbated the socio-economic crisis, increased vulnerability and uncertainty, and made democracy in the world more fragile. As reported in the introduction to this paper, deepening poverty has resulted in inequality and social marginalization and diminishing human security. Pressure on ecosystems and natural resources is increasing, and the evidence of environmental degradation, unsustainable exploitation of natural resources and pollution is all around us.

50. There is a crisis in the implementation of the sustainable development agenda. This crisis can be seen in negative social trends involving a growing gap between the rich and the poor, displacement and resettlement of peoples, erosion of cultural diversity, increased numbers of refugees, violence and abuse of human rights, as well as in ecological trends, including increasing deforestation, loss of biodiversity, destructive mining and oil exploration, adverse climate change and rising sea levels, depletion of fish stocks through industrial fishing practices, inappropriate land use, biopiracy, impact of genetic engineering and other new technologies, destructive agriculture and aqua-culture, unviable dams, water scarcity and decline in water quality, desertification, air pollution, unsustainable tourism and urban sprawl.

51. The failure of civil society to play a role in this crisis has been a major obstacle to implementation. Other fundamental prerequisites to progress are equity, including gender equity, justice and recognition of ecological debt and an ethical rethinking of the values and principles that guide human behaviour. NGOs drew attention to the fact that non-compliance with Agenda 21 in their regions was due to lack of Government commitment.

## A. Poverty, unsustainable consumption and environmental degradation in a globalized world

52. One common feature of the NGO regional and subregional consultations was the emphasis given to the interlinked themes of poverty, unsustainable consumption, particularly in industrialized countries, and environmental degradation. Globalization and trade liberalization were broadly seen as intensifying negative trends.

53. In the Latin American consultations, these forces were seen as contributing to "vulnerability." The participants concluded that the persistence of poverty and social inequity in the region is the main factor in social, political and environmental vulnerability and agreed that social exclusion, ecosystem deterioration, the build-up of risks and natural disasters call for coordinated and joint national and regional activities.

54. NGOs were dismayed by the continuing widespread acceptance of an unsustainable development paradigm. The NGO consultations concluded that this model does not adequately consider the needs of the people and communities, including for employment creation. It was also stated that no one model of development is suited to all countries and regions with diverse populations and circumstances. Inappropriate development policies and practices are increasing the vulnerability of people and ecosystems. The NGO consultations recommended: a paradigm shift to ensure that development models better reflect human needs, including for sound and productive ecosystems.

## B. Combating poverty and promoting secure livelihoods (Agenda 21, chapter 3)

55. NGO regional consultations determined that there has been too little progress on the elimination of poverty since 1992. The report of the South-east Asia subregional preparatory meeting concluded that: poverty is both a cause and consequence of environment degradation. The poor are immediately dependent on threatened fisheries, forests and other natural resource systems for their livelihoods. The health effects of declining air and water quality impact particularly on the urban poor who lack access to clean water and adequate sanitation.

56. The NGO declaration of the Economic Commission for Europe regional meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development emphasized that there had been too little progress on eradicating poverty since 1992. New issues have emerged, notably

new forms of poverty in the Central and Eastern European countries and the newly independent States, while poverty in the poorest nations worldwide has increased. The relationship between poverty and sustainable development is a complex one, but it is clear that poor people are more vulnerable to and affected by environmental degradation.

57. Urgent action was called for to eradicate poverty. Some components of an action plan were identified: (a) equitable and sustainable access to and distribution of resources; (b) securing environmental and social rights; (c) review and reform of development finance (see also finance for sustainable development below); and (d) programmes to achieve international development targets.

## C. Sustainable consumption and production (Agenda 21, chapter 4)

58. The NGO declaration of the Economic Commission for Europe regional meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development stated that: "overconsumption of resources by wealthy groups is often a cause of degradation and can exacerbate poverty". Resource use has not been within sustainable limits or the carrying capacity of the Earth. Overconsumption by both wealthy people and nations undermines sustainable development and can exacerbate poverty.

59. Most Governments of developed nations have failed to take the lead after the Earth Summit emphasized the need for sustainable production and consumption. The ecological debt of the industrialized countries to the developing countries and countries with economies in transition requires radical changes in lifestyles. Part of the problem has been promotion of consumerism. Some areas with inadequate progress and in need of further action by Governments are: (a) "green" procurement policies; (b) promotion of informed consumer choice and options (see also information for decision-making below); (c) sustainable agriculture, with no use of genetically modified organisms, guaranteeing food safety and security and sustainable livelihoods; (d) reductions of $CO_2$ emissions; and (e) energy conservation and increasing reliance on environmentally sound renewable energy.

## D. Globalization (Agenda 21, chapters 2, 30, 33, 34)

60. There was widespread concern about the adverse effects of globalization. For example, the African NGO forum recognized that: the forces of globalization that have shaped the world and the African continent in the last decade have deepened and entrenched poverty, marginalized peoples and nations and accelerated ecological disintegration.

61. The Asia-Pacific Peoples' Forum on Sustainable Development concluded that sustainable development can never be achieved in the present context of globalization with its free market-driven liberalization. The Asian crisis was a wake-up call to the real nature of globalization where financial liberalization created a very unstable international financial system — unregulated capital flows and speculation.

62. The multi-stakeholder round table in Western Asia considered that the situation at the regional level is also aggravated by the social and cultural impact of globalization on societies, including uneven distribution of the benefits of development, the rapid pace of technological change and the information revolution.

63. Serious concerns were raised about the failure, or inability, of Governments to effectively challenge or limit the damaging effects of globalization and economic liberalization. Further progress related to trade, corporate accountability, financing for sustainable development and technology transfer was proposed in this regard.

## E. Trade, investment and incentives (Agenda 21, chapters 2 and 34)

64. Inequities and imbalances in the trade regime, including unequal trade terms, are obstacles to sustainable development. Experience shows that trade alone will not ensure sustainable development. A number of NGOs expressed grave concern over the decisions taken at the recent WTO ministerial conference in Doha, particularly with respect to launching negotiations on "new issues" (investment, transparency in Government procurement, etc.). This concern was based on a belief that unbridled liberalization and deregulation, especially in developing countries, would further undermine

sustainable development efforts. Other NGOs participating in the consultations were more favourably disposed toward the WTO ministerial conference results. The NGO consultations also noted the lack of measures to promote technology transfer from developed to developing countries and to countries with economies in transition.

65. The NGO consultations concluded that there is a need for further progress in a number of areas, including: (a) democratic mechanisms to assess the social, economic and environmental (sustainability) impacts prior to the negotiation of any new trade and investment agreements (including the new round of liberalization); (b) abolishing all environmentally perverse subsidies; (c) implementing economic instruments based on the polluter pays principle; and (d) developing global rules governing publicly financed investment, such as through export credit agencies, within a sustainable development framework.

## F. Corporate accountability (Agenda 21, chapter 30)

66. Existing voluntary corporate social responsibility mechanisms are insufficient because they fail to raise the standards of companies. Since the holding of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Governments have failed to balance the power of corporations with the rights of citizens and labour forces, or to help deliver effective compliance with multilateral environmental and social agreements. Strong concerns were expressed about the weakening of political leadership combined with the increasing influence of the private sector in many countries. For these reasons, it was recommended that progress be made on exploring regulatory approaches for transnational corporations, particularly under the auspices of the United Nations.

## G. Financing for sustainable development (Agenda 21, chapter 33)

67. The burden of debt and debt servicing and the need for sufficient and predictable financial resources were recognized at the NGO consultations. As the regional preparatory process moved forward, there was increasing attention given to the upcoming Financing for Development conference. In addition, consideration was given to the role of speculative capital flows and unsustainable investment patterns by the private and public sectors in contributing to unsustainable trends, particularly in developing countries and countries with economies in transition.

68. The consultations underscored the need for: (a) debt relief or cancellation for highly indebted developing countries and restructuring of debt for countries with economies in transition, taking into account commitments on conservation and restoration of the environment and social programmes; (b) strengthening and consolidation of multilateral financing mechanisms; (c) assessment of the Global Environment Facility in order to expedite mechanisms for access to global environmental projects, as well as for local capacity-building; (d) assessment of financial institutions in order to identify or create mechanisms for access to financing of local sustainability agendas; (e) achievement of the 0.7 per cent of gross national product (GNP) to meet official development assistance (ODA) targets; (f) support for the Global Environment Facility; (g) reallocation of budgets from military spending to poverty eradication and sustainable development; (h) regulation of financial markets and controls on the movement of capital and other mechanisms to ensure that financial markets contribute to sustainable development (e.g., the Tobin tax or other global taxes) and (i) establishment of transparent systems to ensure the effective use of international assistance.

## H. Ecosystems, biodiversity and natural resources (Agenda 21, chapters 9-22)

69. Protection of the environment and rational exploitation of natural resources were seen in some consultations as fundamental principles in sustainable development programmes in view of the need to combat poverty and improve living and economic conditions. The NGOs called for concerted actions by Governments with the involvement of civil society to maintain and restore the ecological balance needed to support life on Earth. They noted that the quality of biodiversity and a clean and healthy environment had not been maintained. Few countries have developed plans or frameworks for achieving sustainable production and consumption patterns. No country has successfully decoupled economic growth from its ecological footprint and very few have prioritized this

effort. They prioritized issues to be tackled, including the severe shortage of water resources, competition from different land uses, unsustainable consumption of natural resources such as forests and fisheries, deterioration of the sea and coastal environment.

70. Inadequate progress has been made in a number of areas, including: (a) policies and programmes to protect and restore ecosystems with the involvement of civil society; (b) policies linking biodiversity conservation with poverty eradication, especially in local communities that live around protected areas, through sustainable use of natural resources; (c) tackling underlying causes of deforestation and forest degradation; (d) integrated water resource management; (e) participatory land use planning; (f) application of the precautionary approach; (g) assessment of the risks inherent in including plantations in the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol; (h) entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol to the United Nations Convention on Climate Change; (i) climate change mitigation strategies and sustainable energy and transport policies; (j) policies recognizing the links between environment and health; and (k) ratification of the chemicals Convention concerning the Safety in the Use of Chemicals at Work.

## I. Governance

### Democracy and power relationships

71. A number of regional consultations highlighted the impacts of conflicts and wars and corrupt and oppressive regimes on prospects for sustainable development. They called for the following types of progress to be made at different levels of governance: *at all levels:* (a) promotion of democracies conducive to popular participation, (b) elimination of corruption and greater transparency and accountability in government affairs, and (c) resolution of conflicts; *at the local level:* (d) empowerment of communities as well as greater integration between different tiers of Government, and (e) decentralization and considerable transfers of state resources to the municipalities; *at the regional and national levels:* (f) formation of coalitions and networks of Southern groups and countries to define policy proposals and obtain increased influence in international negotiations, (g) decisions favouring sustainable development at the highest political levels, and (h) arrangements to foster dialogue between different stakeholders; and *at the global level:* (i) greater democracy in global decision-making processes and international agencies.

## J. Environmental and social rights, including to information for decision-making (Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, principle 10, and Agenda 21, chapters 23-32)

72. The lack of a rights-based approach to achieving global sustainability was noted. This requires recognition that human rights include the right to a healthy environment, including social rights, equitable access to resources and the right of access to justice. This also includes the right to participate in decision-making and to have access to information. Principle 10 of the Rio Declaration states:

> "At the national level, each individual shall have appropriate access to information concerning the environment that is held by public authorities, including ... the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes.... Effective access to judicial and administrative proceedings, including redress and remedy, shall be provided."

Inadequate progress has been made in entrenching such rights in binding agreements and programmes.

73. The NGO regional consultations saw a need for progress on: *at all levels*; programmes to enhance the integration of environmental and human rights; *at the regional and/or national levels:* strengthened implementation of existing regional instruments on public participation or new regional instruments based on the model provided by the Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters; and development of sustainable development indicators; *at the global level:* participatory negotiation of a global convention, building on principle 10 of the Rio Declaration to implement these rights.

## K. Capacity-building (Agenda 21, chapter 37)

74. Inadequate progress has been made in developing local, national and regional capacities and strengthening institutions to promote integration of environmental, social and economic policies. In particular, the NGO consultations called for: *at the local, regional and national levels:* (a) capacity-building to increase consensus between Governments and civil society, and (b) improved capacity to implement, monitor and enforce international agreements and to obtain minimum consensus for the Rio Principles.

## L. Institutions and instruments (Agenda 21, chapters 38 and 39)

75. Despite promises made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, strong governance structures to support sustainable development still have not been put in place. Good governance should be based on accountability, transparency, subsidiary and the participation of civil society. The regional NGO consultations called for further progress on: *at all levels:* multi-sector and multi-stakeholder institutional arrangements; *at the global level:* (a) adequate global institutions to provide leadership, responsibility, compliance and enforcement, (b) credible mechanisms to monitor and enforce sustainable development commitments, (c) ratification of relevant multilateral environment and sustainable development conventions, including, in particular, the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety, the Convention to Combat Desertification and the ILO environmental conventions, and (d) reform of IMF, World Bank and WTO based on more appropriate and democratic governance.

## M. Global deal

76. The notion of the World Summit on Sustainable Development producing a new "global deal" was considered at the Economic Commission for Europe NGO consultation as a result of suggestions made previously by the South African and Danish Governments, among others. Its objective would be to bridge North/South differences on key elements, including: ***equity*** — eradicating poverty through equitable and sustainable access to resources; ***rights*** — securing environmental and social rights; ***limits*** — reducing resource use to within sustainable limits; ***justice*** — recognition of ecological debts and cancellation of financial debts; ***democracy*** — ensuring access to information and public participation; and ***ethics*** — rethinking the values and principles that guide human behaviour.

## N. Non-governmental organizations as partners for sustainable development (chapter 27)

77. Agenda 21 states that

> "Non-governmental organizations play a vital role in the shaping and implementation of participatory democracy ... possess well-established and diverse experience, expertise and capacity in fields which will be of particular importance to the implementation and review of environmentally sound and socially responsible sustainable development, as envisaged throughout Agenda 21".

78. The regional NGO forums acknowledged that the participation of civil society in decision-making processes increased as a result of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, though not to the necessary levels. Some specific areas in which inadequate progress has been made were noted: civil society participation, particularly of women and indigenous people; involvement of young people in sustainable development initiatives; recognition of legitimate civil society organizations and their participation in all phases and levels of sustainable development; establishment of participatory national councils for sustainable development and other participation mechanisms agreed in Agenda 21; and increased cooperation between NGOs and the private sector. (Chapter 27 of Agenda 21 is considered in more detail in chapter I above.)

## O. Specific recommendations on participation in the preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development

79. NGOs experienced certain difficulties in the regional preparatory process for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. These included insufficient representation in the elaboration of agendas for the meetings of the regional preparatory committees and in the events themselves. The second preparatory session will shape the format of the multi-stakeholder dialogues at the fourth preparatory session and at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. It will be important to avoid the mistakes made in the regional preparatory process. The difficult experiences with NGO participation at the meetings of the regional preparatory committees gave rise to suggestions for ensuring the full integration of NGOs in the remainder of the preparatory process. These included: (a) informal consultations during the second preparatory session between the secretariat of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and NGO networks (including those who participated in subregional preparatory processes) on modalities for the third and fourth preparatory sessions and the Summit; (b) mechanisms for enabling NGO participation in core events and discussions, such as plenary and working group sessions, not only in side events; (c) provision of financial and logistical support for NGOs to participate; and (d) inclusion of NGOs on national delegations.

*Notes*

[1] See *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty*, World Bank; *Living Planet Report 2000*, World Wide Fund for Nature; and *Making Sustainable Commitments: An Environment Strategy for the World Bank*, World Bank.

[2] Source materials: *African Civil Society Position of the African NGO Forum to the African Ministerial PrepCom*, 15-16 October 2001, Nairobi; *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, Vol. 22, Nos. 5, 6, 7, 8 (2001); *Statement of NGOs for meeting of Latin American and Caribbean Networks*, 20 October 2001, Rio de Janeiro; *Report of the thematic roundtable for the Western Asia region*, 9-11 April 2001, Beirut; *Abu-Dhabi Declaration*, 4 February 2001; *Statement of the Asia-Pacific People's Forum on Sustainable Development*, 25-26 November 2001, Phnom Penh; *Civil society subregional report for the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, Preliminary report for the South-east Asia subregional preparatory meeting, 14 October 2001, Manila; *Recommendations of regional consultations of newly independent States on preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development "Rio+10"*, 22-23 November 2001, Moscow; *Summary of main recommendations: Consultation workshop of NGOs of the newly independent States on preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, 2-3 July 2001, Golitsino; *NGO Declaration. Economic Commission for Europe regional meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development*, 22-23 September 2001, Geneva.